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26 April 1957

AQUATONE/OILSTONE PROJECT

1. Status:

a. Weather conditions are generally favorable for aerial reconnaissance over Europe and most of Siberia from 1 April through October and in the Far East moderately good in the summer and at their best during the autumn.

25X1D (4) b. AQUATONE Detachments are now in place and operational in Germany, Turkey, and Japan. They fly occasional weather missions [redacted]

[redacted] The Detachment in Turkey carries out occasional reconnaissance over the Middle East.

c. During the last nine months significant progress has been achieved in the development of radar camouflage. It is believed that the radar reflectivity of the U-2 aircraft can be so reduced that a majority of overflight missions will avoid detection entirely. Nevertheless, it must be anticipated that at least a certain proportion of them will be detected, although their continuous tracking should be extremely difficult. It is hoped that this development can be operational by late June.

d. It now appears likely that with this radar camouflage the U-2 will be relatively safe from interception at least through the 1958 reconnaissance season. Nevertheless, both its margin of advantage and the security surrounding this operation are subject to continuous erosion so the AQUATONE capability must be regarded as a wasting asset.

2. Plans for the Current Season: Additional hard intelligence of a sort that could best be obtained through aerial reconnaissance is urgently required, especially on Soviet guided missiles, nuclear weapons, and inter-continental bombers. Taking account of normal weather patterns, twelve to fifteen successful missions should be sufficient to cover some thirty-six targets which have been selected by the Intelligence Community as having the highest priority. It is proposed that these be undertaken, but only as highly favorable weather develops in order to obtain maximum coverage with a minimum number of sorties. This would imply a rate of operations of only one to three missions per week.

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3. Maintenance of the Capability: The principal reason for developing the AQUATONE capability originally within the CIA framework rather than in the Air Force was to maintain greater security, employ deeper cover, use civilian pilots, keep the aircraft outside of military control, and therefore make possible more plausible denial of U.S. military responsibility in the face of any Soviet charges. Currently two SAC squadrons are being equipped with this same aircraft in addition to the three AQUATONE Detachments. If this capability is politically more useable, for the reasons just stated, in the hands of the Clandestine Service than in those of the regular military establishment, it is proposed that it be maintained through 1958 separate from the SAC units (subject, of course, to the immediate transfer to SAC in the event of a war emergency). If, however, no such political advantage can be derived by leaving this tool in the hands of the Clandestine Service it is proposed that CIA's equipment be transferred to the Air Force after the present photographic season.

4. Decisions Required: It is becoming increasingly urgent to obtain answers to the following questions:

a. Will limited overflights of the highest priority targets be permitted;

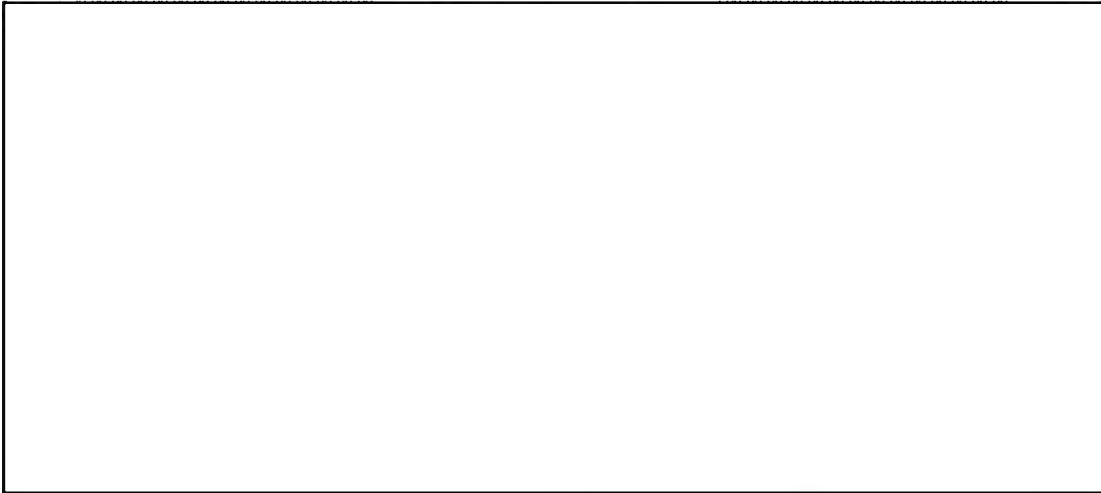
- (1) Over the highest priority targets in the USSR, or
- (2) Over specified peripheral areas of the USSR where high priority targets are located, or
- (3) Over China, or
- (4) Over the European Satellites?

b. If such overflights cannot be authorized at present, will successful completion of the development of radar camouflage up to the standard indicated in paragraph 1.c. above render these operations acceptable?

c. Whether or not overflights are to be authorized at this time is it desirable to maintain an overflight capability outside of the regular military establishment?

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(4) The modification of the aircraft to permit their operation without pilots, that is, as subsonic guided missiles retrievable as drones.

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